

August 29, 2022



## Dear Colleagues:

We, the staff of the Columbus Museum of Art, wholeheartedly support the Museum's vision of courageously reimagining what it means to be a forward-thinking institution, by encouraging and fostering new ideas and perspectives in our community. However, like most cultural institutions, CMA has imperfections that impact each employee differently. While many must juggle a work culture rife with hierarchical attitudes, others face leadership's decision-making with no voice or power. We have all witnessed this, and believe this beloved institution must be better. That is why we—staff members from departments across the museum—are announcing our intent to form a union with the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) Council 8.

In the fall of 2020, CMA reduced its workforce by 30% and decreased budgets across the institution, leaving the remaining staff with financial uncertainties and grueling workloads. At the height of the pandemic, our front-facing workers were required to return to work on-site with no hazard pay, minimal protective equipment from management, and a constantly changing a COVID policy, well before vaccines were available. This decision resulted in mental health and safety concerns for employees, especially during the popular Van Gogh exhibition which drew record crowds amidst COVID spikes in our community. Working with a significantly smaller staff and no COVID policy enforcement, frontline staff still welcomed thousands of visitors every week to the museum. Despite numerous, vocal concerns for their own safety, decisions around the museum's COVID contingency plan were made without regard to the well-being of the many hardworking employees who helped ensure the success of Van Gogh. The exhibition may be over, and while we are looking forward to creating high-quality exhibitions in the future, we hope to end the cycle of ignoring employee input and a disregard for our health and safety that continues to shape our workplace.

It is clear that public optics play a significant role in guiding policy-making at CMA, without consideration of staff members. There has long been a disconnect between management and frontline staff, —and the decision-making process rarely includes the voices of those most directly impacted. These challenges reveal long-standing concerns throughout the institution, which we fear will continue to persist within the workplace, future exhibitions, and events. We do not take these experiences and issues lightly. In fact, they have led us to stand in solidarity by forming a union to recognize that a fairer workplace is possible.



**We love working with our community and visitors, we love working within a cultural institution, and we love art. Rooted in these passions, we are taking steps to improve our workplace by having:**

- Job security, livable wages, and benefits that take into account both the rising cost of living in Columbus and the talents of our skilled workforce
- Safe working conditions, resources to perform job responsibilities, reasonable working hours, or any appropriate accommodations to compensate in the instance that these are not met
- A stake in the policy-making process that affects us all
- A workplace free from microaggressions and any form of harassment
- Transparency of internal advancement and equal access to these opportunities
- Accountability from each staff member regardless of job title

**Through CMA Workers United, we will advocate for a transparent, inclusive, and sustainable workplace for CMA employees.**

Today, we call on CMA leadership to voluntarily recognize our union, so we may continue CMA's innovative role of redefining the 21st-century art museum. We believe this is the best path for leadership to demonstrate their commitment to impactful and positive growth and improving institutional morale. We urge CMA leadership to honor our legal right to organize without facing retaliation and to join our collective drive for change. Ultimately, we are seeking a strong, lasting partnership with management that takes employee concerns into account and believe our union is the best way to ensure we are treated as collaborative partners in making CMA the best it can possibly be. We are entering a movement within cultural institutions both in Columbus and throughout the country, including the Wexner Center for the Arts, The Art Institute of Chicago, the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art, and the Philadelphia Museum of Art. We join them in this movement for a fairer, more just workplace.

Without the workers, there is no way for CMA to reach its mission of creating great experiences with great art for everyone; we don't stop being part of *everyone* once we put on a badge.

Respectfully,  
CMA Workers United  
AFSCME Council 8